



# Yolo Elections Office

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## How Vote-By-Mail Ballots Are Counted

We welcome and encourage members of the public to visit our office and observe how we process and count ballots.

**When you return your Vote-by-Mail (VBM) ballot to Yolo County Elections, your ballot flows through specific steps before being totaled and added to results.**

### What are these steps?

#### 1. Sorting

Yolo County Elections operates a high-speed mail sorting machine called the "Agilis" manufactured by Runbeck Election Services, Inc. The Agilis first scans the barcode on the returned ballot envelope and takes a picture of the voter's signature. A [45-second video of the Agilis](#) can be seen on our YouTube channel.

Then, the ballot's next pass through the Agilis takes place after the signature on the envelope has been verified or challenged. Verified ballot envelopes are sorted in voting precinct consolidation groups and stored for opening. Challenged ballot envelopes are held in secure storage, not to be counted unless and until the challenge has been resolved and the signature verified.

#### 2. Signature Verification

As soon as the envelopes make their first pass through the Agilis, Yolo County Elections staff compare the signature on the envelope with the signatures on file in the voter's record. Our staff are trained to look for similar characteristics, such as height, slant, and spacing of letters. If the signatures match, the ballot is qualified to be counted.

If there is a challenge to the voter's eligibility or the signature does not match, the ballot envelope is flagged for further review by supervisors and management. A challenge requires the voter to resolve the issue before the ballot can be counted. Many challenges occur simply because the voter did not sign the return envelope. Most other issues are because the signatures do not match closely enough. If there is an issue of any kind, Yolo County Elections contacts the voter with a letter to help "cure" the challenge. We also make calls and send emails if we have that contact information on record. We provide all the instructions a voter needs to resolve the issue and encourage voters to contact our office if they have any questions.

**To track your Vote-by-Mail ballot—when it is mailed, received, and counted—and receive notifications on its status, sign-up with the California Secretary of State's service at [WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov](https://wheresmyballot.sos.ca.gov) to receive automatic email, SMS (text), or voice call notifications about your ballot.**

#### 3. Opening

Opening the envelopes, extracting the ballots, and preparing them for scanning is one of the most labor-intensive steps in the process. Yolo County Elections operates two ballot extraction machines from the OPEX Corporation. Extractor teams of two or three staff members work each machine, batching up to 300 Vote-by-Mail return envelopes at a time. This higher-speed precision process can be viewed on our YouTube channel in a [30-second video](#).

First, the OPEX machine cuts the VBM return envelope and uses a little suction of air to OPen the envelope, allowing a team member to EXtract the voted ballot. This is the moment in which the voter's identity is forever severed from the ballot and voting selections.

Next, the empty envelopes are grouped with the extracted but still folded ballots. A team of two staff members counts and logs the number of envelopes and ballots. The envelopes are then set aside and stored for the legal retention period.

Finally, the ballots are unfolded and briefly inspected to ensure they will go through the voting system scanner with no issues. The teams remove any stubs attached to the ballots. Ballots with physical damage are sent to ballot duplication teams comprised of two staff members who will manually duplicate the voter's markings onto a new ballot. Ballot duplication uses tracking numbers and quality assurance checks to ensure accuracy and transparency. Batches of ballots ready for scanning are moved on to the next step in the process.

#### 4. Scanning

Yolo County Elections operates the Hart InterCivic Verity voting equipment to scan the ballots, front and back. All components of the Verity system are stand-alone and not connected to the internet or even the county's computer network. The computers attached to the scanners store the ballot images and vote selections, but results are not totaled until after the polls close on Election Day. This feature of the voting system allows us to begin scanning the ballots before Election Day.

#### 5. Ballot Review

Once ballots are scanned, a ballot "adjudication" team of two reviews all questionable marks to ensure votes are counted as the voter intended. Yolo County uses the California Use Procedures for the Verity System and the California Secretary of State's manual for determining voter intent ([Uniform Vote Counting Standards](#)).

#### 6. Election Night Results

The totaling of the votes occurs after 8:00 p.m. on Election Day when the initial election results reports are generated and made public. Ballots continue to be processed, votes counted, and results shared until the election is certified. Certification periods differ based on the type of election and range from 28 to 30 days.

#### 7. Canvass and Final Results

Initial unofficial results are posted to the Yolo County Elections website around 8:15 p.m. on Election Day and generally include results from vote-by-mail ballots received by our office prior to Election Day. Following the initial posting, updated results are posted on our website based on canvassing progress. Postings are announced across the County's social media platforms. During the period between the close of polls and certification of the election results, Yolo County Elections conducts a complete canvass of the election materials to verify all eligible ballots are accurately counted.

Filed under: [Voting](#)

Open Monday through Friday

8:00 am – 5:00 pm



Yolo County Administration Building  
625 Court Street, Suite B05  
Woodland, CA 95695

PO Box 1820  
Woodland, CA 95776

(530) 666-8133  
(916) 375-6490  
(800) 649-9943

Fax: (530) 666-8123